

# critical digest

VOL. IV No. 11

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

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## New York Opening This Week

Paint Your Wagon-Shubert, 11/12/51. Cheryl Crawford presents a new musical with book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner and music by Frederick Loewe. Starring Olga San Juan and James Barton, with Tony Bavaar and James Mitchell featured players. Directed by Daniel Mann.

## Digests of Current Reviews - more on Page 3

Top Banana-Winter Garden, 11/1/51. Phil Silvers' field day in Paula Stone-Michael Sloane musical won unanimous approval of first night critics. But three appraisers didn't think the comic's talents enough to fill an entire evening's entertainment. Supporting cast received few compliments, with Silvers taking most of the adjectives. Bob Sheerer's dancing won praise, as did singing by Judy Lynn and Lindy Doherty. Split decision on Rose Marie's singing talents. Minor comics were applauded, but none singled out for honors. Tunes by Johnny Mercer were called undistinguished by most, though Coleman, Mirror, thinks several of the songs will be hits. Roundup of favorite burlesque gags found favor with all, while none liked the ballet. Dissenters included Watts, Post; Garland, Journal American and Shipley, New Leader. Post critic enjoyed Silvers, but found book dismal, the love story depressing, the score commonplace and Rose Marie impossible. Most agreed with opinion of Atkinson, Times, that show places Silvers in star role himself. Though many commented that show will last as long as the comic's health can stand the hectic pace.

The Fourposter-Barrymore, 10/24/51. Two character play by Jan de Hartog, produced by Playwrights Company won split decision from weekly reviewers. All praised Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy, helpful direction by Jose Ferrer and the set and costumes. Billboard, Variety, Cue and Christian Science Monitor critics admitted script offered nothing new, but combination of elements made for delightful show. Hobe, Variety, noted script had improved since summer tryout, while Ferrer's direction added much useful business. Time and New Yorker aisle men panned script as too sentimental, while the characters were too uninteresting. George Jean Nathan joined the dissenters, remarking that author's sticking to title for his theme turns the comedy into a farce before evening's end. Gabriel, Cue, thought it may have been just a set of sublimated comic strips, but recommended it to most married couples who want to see themselves nicely portrayed.

Remains To Be Seen-Morosco, 10/3/51. Dissenting opinions voiced by Krutch, Nation and Kerr, Commonweal, against Leland Hayward's production of Lindsay and Crouse new comedy-mystery. Latter felt show should have been much better, some wonderfully funny ideas having been frittered away on a carelessly hacked out narrative. Former found it a collection of gags, some gruesome, some mildly bawdy, none very funny. Both critics surprised that authors had lowered themselves to this level.

## Out of Town Reviews

Paul Osborn's adaptation of Marquand's Point of No Return is a skillful job, skillfully acted by a fine cast headed by Henry Fonda, Golly, Billboard and Bone, Variety, commented after New Haven debut of Leland Hayward's production. Necessary revisions will aid. Play is scheduled to open in N.Y. December 13th.

## News & Notes

Ward Morehouse, WT&S, in hospital for brief rest...Actors Equity opposed to TVA joining 4A Actors Unions.

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' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '  
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|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times            | 12. Chr. Science Monitor   | 23. WCBS Leonard    |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune   | 13. Journal of Commerce    | 24. Commonweal      |
| 3. NY News             | 14. Morning Telegraph-WFDR | 25. Cue             |
| 4. NY Mirror           | 15. Ward Morehouse         | 26. Nation          |
| 5. NY Compass          | 16. George Jean Nathan     | 27. New Leader-WEVD |
| 6. NY Post             | 17. Wall Street Journal    | 28. New Republic    |
| 7. NY Journal American | 18. Women's Wear           | 29. Newsweek        |
| 8. NY World Tele-Sun   | 19. Billboard              | 30. New Yorker      |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle      | 20. Variety                | 31. Park East       |
| 10. LI Press           | 21. Critical Digest        | 32. Saturday Review |
| 11. Newark News        | 22. Theatre Arts           | 33. Time            |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro."

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| AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50         | Con: 1-6-9-11-12-15-16-17-18-22-23-24-25-28-29-32.<br>None Yet: 10-14-21-26. So-So: 31.                  |
| BAREFOOT IN ATHENS-10/31/51      | Con: 1-2-10-15. /33.<br>None Yet: 12-13-14-16-17-18-19-20-21-22 and 25 thru                              |
| BAGELS AND YOX-9/12/51           | Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-9-10-15-16-19-20-21-25-27-28.<br>None Yet: 12-13-14-17-18-22-23-24-26-29-30-31-32-33. |
| BORSCHT CAPADES-9/17/51          | Con: 1-2-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-21-25-27-28-30. -33.<br>None Yet: 12-14-15-16-17-18-22-23-24-26-29-30-31-32     |
| CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50           | Con: 19-22-26-28.<br>None Yet: 10-14-21-23.  |
| DIAMOND LIL'-9/14/51             | "All the critics for Mae, per usual, but against her play."  |
| FAITHFULLY YOURS-10/18/51        | Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-15-18-20-21-22-25-29-30-33<br>None Yet: 12-13-14-16-17-19-24-26-27-28-31-32.   |
| THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51          | Con: 2-6-15-27.<br>None Yet: 12-13-14-16 thru 22-24-25-26-28 thru 33.                                    |
| GLAD TIDINGS-10/11/51            | Con: 1-2-4-5-6-15-17-18-19-20-24-25-26-29-30-33.<br>None Yet: 10-12-14-16-21-22-27-28-31-32.             |
| GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50          | Con: 26. None Yet: 10-21. -33.   |
| LACE ON HER PETTICOAT-9/14/51    | Con: 1-2-4-6-7-8-9-15-16-17-18-19-20-23-24-25-28-30<br>None Yet: 12-14-22-29-32.                         |
| LOVE AND LET LOVE-10/19/51       | Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-18-20-23-25-29-30-33.<br>None Yet: 12 thru 17-21-22-24-26-27-28-31-32.      |
| THE KING AND I-3/29/51           | Con: 26. None Yet: 10-21-22-24.  |
| THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51          | Con: 16-22. None Yet: 10-21-26-32.   |
| MUSIC IN THE AIR-10/8/51         | Con: 5-6-7-8-15-16-17-20-22-23-24-33.<br>None Yet: 12-14-19-21-26-27-28-30-31-32.                        |
| THE NUMBER-10/30/51              | Con: 1-2-4-8-9-23-24. 33.<br>None Yet: 10-11-12-13-15-16-17-19-20-21-22-25 thru                          |
| REMAINS TO BE SEEN-10/3/51       | Con: 1-7-16-21-30-33.<br>None Yet: 12-13-17-22-24-26-27-28.  |
| SAINT JOAN-10/4/51               | Con: 2-4-6-15-23-33.<br>None Yet: 12-13-14-16-17-22-24 thru 28-31-32.                                    |
| SEVENTEEN-6/22/51                | Con: 2-4-7-26-29-30-33. None Yet: 21-22-27-28-32.  |
| SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49             | Con: 33. So-So: 25.<br>None Yet: 5-9-10-11-21-24-26-27-28.   |
| STALAG 17-5/8/51                 | Con: 4-25-26-27-30. None Yet: 10-21-22. So-So: 3.  |
| A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN-4/19/51 | Con: 2-7-16-19-26-27-32-33. None Yet: 10-15-21-22.   |
| TWO ON THE AISLE-7/19/51         | Con: 2-3-26. None Yet: 10-12-22-27-28-32.  |

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' Green Room Department '  
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OPEN WARFARE...Nastiest crack in eternal war between critics and performers voiced by Fred Allen on NBC The Big Show, points out Winchell. Allen inquired "Ever consider a critic's taste? Just take a look at their wives." Columnist commented this was ungood. Critics and/or their wives are invited to defend themselves via "CD" Mail Box.

PLAY READING BOOM...Sudden and surprising success of Don Juan in Hell will certainly lead to a play reading boom by producers who think it is an easy way to make money, predicts Pollock, Compass. But critic reminds them that it isn't as easy as it looks.

UNANIMOUS QUESTION...Teen-agers interested in the theatre all want to know "How to get started", Rice, Post, observed after attending a "Footlights In Your Eyes" meeting. High school students posed question in many different forms to Seventeen cast and staff. Rice worried because while they weren't encouraged, they also weren't discouraged in their hopes. He wonders how to make them believe that being a ditch digger is better than being in the theatre today.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Theatre tickets make an excellent Christmas present, suggests Coleman, Mirror...46th Street Theatre and 48th Street Theatre should have their names changed to Damon Runyon Theatre and Al Jolson Theatre recommends Durling, Journal American.

1961 PREVIEW...When the W.Morehouse (WT&S) Stock Company takes over the Amsterdam Theatre in 1961 the repertoire will include Shenandoah, Secret Service and Held By the Enemy. Guthrie McClintic will direct and Barbara Bel Geddes and Barry Jones will be included in the company. Two new theatres will be built on Fifth Avenue and on Central Park South. While some of the bigger openings will start at 6:00 PM.

COLUMN TIPS...The King and I semi-nude dancers may strike unless heat provided backstage, informs Walker...Government probes to investigate certain actors connected with summer theatres, hears Winchell.

MAIL BOX...Why not put the name of play and curtain time on theatre tickets, suggests Times reader...Lindsay and Crouse asked Kilgallen to supply list of jazz bands at dinner spots if columnist didn't like those named in Remains To Be Seen, but columnist turned down honor...Carmody, Washington Star, objects to Arthur Lesser's warning against following advice of out of town critics. Just as sensible, he writes, as believing an out of town policeman, etcetera.

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' Digests of Current Reviews '  
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Saint Joan-Cort, 10/4/51. Three weekly critics expressed disappointment at pedestrian performance and production turned in by all departments in the Theatre Guild's revival of the famed Shaw play. Clurman, New Republic; Kerr, Commonweal and Brown, SRL, agreed that play is Shaw's finest, if not one of the finest of the modern theatre. But Clurman and Kerr blamed director Margaret Webster for staging it without any style. A revival needs more than understanding, they explained; it needs a fresh, lively approach to the work. Hagen likewise didn't give any fire or warmth to the title role. Kerr thought made an error in trying to direct Shaw like she does Shakespeare. Brown, SRL, was equally disappointed. He would have liked to see Shaw himself play the role, as Webster had done. Clurman did recommend the play for the text itself, Krutch, Nation, praised cast and production for a highly successful revival. Shipley, New Leader, also thought it was an admirably effective job.



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' Meet the Critic - Gilbert W. Gabriel '  
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The average New York theatre's appearance makes theatre going uninviting as a regular habit, Gilbert W. Gabriel told "Critical Digest" in an exclusive interview. The "Cue" critic, recently named president of New York Drama Critics Circle, firmly believes that compared to the average movie house the average New York theatre is uncomfortable, antiquated and unobliging. Added to the fact that the theatres are stuck in a nightmare of a place, Broadway at night, he can understand why more people don't go to the theatre more often. Abroad it can be a pleasure and a holiday to go to the theatre, while in New York it becomes a dreadful chore.

The common denominator of his role as "Cue" reviewer is to advise the reader if he should see the show himself. Because "Cue" is a service magazine this is a duty he can't escape. Gabriel receives more mail on the magazine than he did at any of his daily reviewing posts. But he likes writing for a weekly better than a daily, he explained. Though he has had offers to go back to the dailies, he admits he enjoys too much the decency and luxury of being allowed to think over what he is going to write before he has to write it. At one time in his career, while drama critic of the New York American, he had to rush out of the theatre before the third act. He circumvented this hazard by catching the plays out of town and by reading scripts.

Gabriel, who thinks he may have been elected head of the New York reviewers' group on the basis of superlative decrepitude, has had wide experience as a critic of the arts. A graduate of Williams College, his first writing job was as a reporter on the New York Sun. For nine years he was the paper's music critic, taking a sabbatical year off in which to study in Rome. He switched to the New York World Telegram for a year as drama critic, and then went back to the New York Sun for another decade as drama critic. This was followed by a long, lonely stretch as reviewer for the New York American. When that paper folded he went to Hollywood for several "grim" assignments as a high priced scenario writer at Paramount. This was followed by a short term of drama reviewing for "Theatre Arts." He joined "Cue" in 1949.

The critic has nine novels to his credit, several of which have been sold to motion picture companies. At present he is working on a new one. During the last war he headed the Alaska OWI office, while in the first war he was an officer in the infantry. Though the Army has lately invited him back for a possible third, he is going to stay on the home front. He'll be content, he states, with that everlasting battling between conscientious critics and irate actors, playwrights, producers, etal. At one time Gabriel also taught a class in drama criticism at New York University. But he noted that while several of his students turned into top motion picture producers, none developed into critics.

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' Legit Stuff '  
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Shows that closed include Diamond Lil...Show of the Month Club suing Shuberts over Top Banana ticket dispute...The Number has been revised and two cast members fired...New Dramatists Committee seeking volunteer actors and directors..."Theatre Arts" quizzing critics on the outstanding contributions to theatre during past year...Theatre Guild's Point of Departure has changed name to Legend of Lovers...Vivian Blaine back in Guys and Dolls, Russell Nye back in Call Me Madam...Stalag 17 paid off its backers...Equity reaffirmed stand against blacklisting...Actors Fund of America collected \$14,000 from summer theatre annual collection...Robert E. Sherwood resigned as chairman of Council of Living Theatre...Gilbert Miller saving cheaper seats to Gigi for students of French, planning matinee stage tours and discussions...Paul Green on world wide lecture tour.

